AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

For the convenience of the Examiner, all claims have been presented whether or not an amendment has been made. The claims have been amended as follows:

1. **(Currently Amended)** A method for processing returned items of merchandise; comprising the steps of:

dispatching a local return agent to a location identified by a consumer associated with an item for return, the location remote from any return center, the local return agent comprising a shipping agent;

providing returns guidelines to ~~a local return agent~~ **the local return agent** over a communications link, the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at ~~a location~~ **the location** remote from any return center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receiving an item remotely determined to be eligible for return at the return center;

accessing one or more return rules of the merchant associated with the item; and

processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

2. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the method is performed by a third party on behalf of the merchant.

3. **(Original)** The method of Claim 2, wherein the method is performed for multiple merchants.

4. **(Cancelled)**

5. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of electronically delivering notice of the return to a merchant associated with the return.

6. **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by determining a final destination of the return.

7.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by determining disposition of the return.

8.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the accessing step is performed via the Internet.

9.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by returning an ineligible return to the customer.

10.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by shipping the item to a location maintained by a merchant associated with the item.

11.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by assigning the item to an on-line auction.

12.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the processing step is performed by shipping the item to a re-purchaser.

13.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of labeling the item for subsequent processing.

14.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the receiving step is performed by receiving the item from a carrier.

15.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, wherein the receiving step is performed by receiving the item directly from a customer.

16.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of inspecting the item at the returns center.

17.   **(Original)**   The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of consolidating items to be shipped to a common destination.

18.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of crediting an account associated with a customer associated with the return.

19.   **(Original)** The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of accessing transaction data associated with the item.

20.   **(Currently Amended)** A merchandise return system for use by a return center, comprising a computer system programmed to:

provide returns guidelines to a local return agent over a communications link, **the local return agent comprising a shipping agent dispatched to a location identified by a consumer associated with an item for return, the location remote from any return center,** the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at ~~a location~~ **the location** remote from any return center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receive data identifying an item remotely determined to be eligible for return received at the return center;

access one or more return rules of a merchant associated with the item; and

provide information for processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

21.   **(Original)** The system of Claim 20, wherein the system is at least in part implemented by a network that communicates with the return center via the Internet.

22.   **(Currently Amended)**   A computer product for facilitating merchandise returns, the computer product having instructions for:

providing returns guidelines to a local return agent over a communications link, **the local return agent comprising a shipping agent dispatched to a location identified by a consumer associated with an item for return, the location remote from any return center,** the returns guidelines for use by the local return agent in making a determination at ~~a location~~ **the location** remote from any return center as to the eligibility of an item for return, the local return agent authorized to make the determination on behalf of a merchant;

receiving data identifying an item remotely determined to be eligible for return received at the return center;

accessing one or more return rules of a merchant associated with the item; and

providing information for processing the return in accordance with the return rules.

23.   **(Original)**   The computer product of Claim 22, wherein at least one of the steps is performed via the Internet.